

MERCHANT MARINER DOCUMENTS

Background. In the wake of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the Coast Guard has looked for new ways to improve port, waterway, and maritime security. The Marine Safety program recognized early on that there were problems inherent in the mariner credentialing system that could result in licensing fraud, exploitation by persons ineligible to hold credentials and increased risk of marine safety incidents if unqualified persons obtained a Merchant Mariner Document (MMD). Additionally, the potential for exploitation of these credentials by criminal or terrorist organizations is real and poses a threat to national security. In response to these concerns, the Coast Guard developed a new, more secure and tamper resistant MMD card and made the timely identification of individuals that may pose a security or marine safety threat a top priority. Enhanced screening procedures are now in use for all renewals and original applications. The Coast Guard fully realizes that an efficient credentialing system is vital to the smooth flow of commerce and thus we are adding staff to some of our busiest RECs to help reduce the backlog of applications.

Key Points.

- To identify potential safety and security concerns, the Coast Guard is working within its long-standing statutory authority to implement enhanced screening procedures for current document holders and those mariners seeking an original MMD.
- Application procedures are essentially the same for the mariner, with the notable exception that renewals can no longer be completed entirely through the mail. Applicants must now appear in person at a Coast Guard Regional Exam Center sometime during the renewal process to prove their identity and provide fingerprints.
- To minimize the effect on the mariner, RECs are using the following priority system for processing applications:
 - Priority 1: Mariners on MSC/MARAD vessels
 - Priority 2: Mariners who are actively sailing
 - Priority 3: All others
- These new screening procedures have added approximately 48 hours to the overall processing time for applications if no concerns requiring further investigation are found.
- A new, more tamper-resistant and accountable form is now in use to further improve security and deter counterfeiting and fraud. It is similar in appearance to previous MMDs or Z-cards, but has enhanced security features and a serial number.
- Additional resources have been sent to supplement the RECs and the National Maritime Center (NMC) to help smooth the transition to the new application process and improve customer service.
- The Coast Guard is also investigating aligning the MMD process with the Transportation Workers Identity Credential.
- There is not yet a “phase out” schedule for existing MMDs printed on the old card. The NMC will provide timely notification of any decision to “phase out” the old cards that would require early renewals of old MMDs.

If you have additional questions, please contact:

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